



METROPOLITAN  
TRANSPORTATION  
COMMISSION

Agenda Item 4b

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*Memorandum*

TO: Operations Committee

DATE: September 5, 2008

FR: Executive Director

W. I. 1231

RE: Rural Commute Roads Map

At the December 2007 Operations Committee meeting, staff presented a status report on work related to AB 15, which calls for the development of recommendations to expedite funding of a median barrier project on Vasco Road. In follow-up to the report, Committee members asked staff to research whether other rural roads in the Bay Area, comparable to Vasco Road in design features and historical traffic volumes, are experiencing a similar increase in commute traffic, and what implications these changes may have on safety.

The attached map summarizes the results of this investigation. Data was requested from all nine Bay Area counties, specifically to identify roads in historically rural parts of the region which may have experienced large increases in traffic volumes over the last decade. In order to focus on roads that now carry large volumes of commute traffic on weekdays, two criteria were implemented to screen the data: (a) the minimum peak hour volume in 2006 must exceed 1,000 vehicles per hour, in order to eliminate roads that may have experienced a large proportional increase in traffic but are still carrying relatively low volumes, and (b) the roads must traverse rural areas (i.e. those that meet the minimum rural housing density threshold).

As a point of reference, peak hour traffic volumes on Vasco Road in Contra Costa County increased by 14% between 1996 and 2006, reflecting a net change of about 250 more vehicles on this road during the peak commute hour. Many other roads in rural parts of the Bay Area have experienced comparable or greater increases in traffic, both in terms of percentage changes as well as net increases in volume. Not surprisingly, many of these roads are bordered by rapidly growing communities such as Brentwood. The map highlights road segments which show representative traffic volume changes over the last ten years, and which may indicate the need for safety improvements similar to those being considered for Vasco Road.

Unfortunately, comparative accident statistics were not readily available for most of the roads in question, and thus are not shown on the map. Data was available, however, for some routes in Contra Costa County. In spite of large proportional increases in peak hour traffic on Marsh Creek Road (+ 139%) and Byron Highway (+ 29%), accident rates on those roads have actually

declined over the last ten years. Marsh Creek Road's accident rate declined from 1.36 accidents per million vehicle miles (mvm) traveled in 1996 to 1.00 accidents per mvm in 2006. Similarly, Byron Highway's accident rate dropped from 1.12 per mvm in 1996 to 0.72 per mvm in 2006.

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Steve Heminger